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ABSTRACT

Alternative certification programs allow individuals with college degrees in other fields to enter teaching without enrolling in traditional campus-based teacher education programs. These programs are designed to reduce the time and expense of obtaining teaching credentials through a streamlined curriculum coupled with intensive on-the-job supervision. This report focuses on alternative certification programs operated by the Houston Independent School District (Texas) and by San Jose State University (California). Both programs were evaluated through on-site visits; review of program documents and operations; and interviews with key personnel, prior and current trainees, trainee mentors, and employers. Programs were similar in that they relied on collaborative agreements for program implementation, employed similar systems of trainee supervision, and used a state-mandated exit exam for program completion. Program distinctions included differing sponsoring agencies, nature of recruitment and eligibility process, trainee orientation process, delivery of instruction, and program philosophies. Participants in both programs agreed that alternative certification programs are a viable option for the preparation of special education personnel, addressing teacher shortages and attracting qualified individuals. Project staff in both programs asserted the superiority of the programs over typical inservice training for special educators working on emergency or provisional teacher permits. (Contains 40 references.) (LP)

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ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TWO MODELS

Introduction

The urgent need to train additional special education teachers has resulted in a variety of initiatives by state agencies as well as the federal government to create additional training programs, to simplify certification requirements, and to devise alternative methods for the preparation of teaching personnel. Such alternative routes to certification have raised serious issues about the qualifications of teachers trained by short-cut methods, as well as the quality of services they are able to provide to students with disabilities. Although highly touted as the answer to the supply -demand imbalance of special education teaching personnel, alternative certification models, to date, have not produced conclusive and convincing evidence of their effectiveness. To date, there has been practically no research reported investigating the effects of alternative certification programs, or their impact on schooling or students. The existing literature has described the features of such programs, but has failed to report data on the proficiency of teachers prepared by alternative certification programs, their subsequent employment and retention probabilities, or their impact on services to students. And, no data is currently available that evaluates the effectiveness of alternative certification programs in preparing special educators. Such research is clearly needed, both by policymakers and by practitioners.

Need for The Research

The shortage of educational personnel to serve students with disabilities in the nation's schools is a problem fast approaching crisis dimensions. A serious shortfall of teachers has been predicted for all areas of education in the 1990s, but especially for special educators (Akin, 1988). The situation is generally recognized as immediately critical for special education (Smith-Davis, 1990). The number of students enrolled in special education programs has been slowly growing (McLaughlin, Smith-Davis & Burke, 1986; United States Department of Education, 1990), while the number of degrees conferred in special education has been steadily declining (Geiger, 1988). In rural areas, severe shortages of special education personnel have persisted for many years (Helge & Marrs, 1982; Lauritzen, 1988; McLaughlin, Smith-Davis & Burke, 1986; Smith-Davis, Burke & Noel, 1984). There is thus an urgent need to prepare a sufficient number to teachers to counteract these shortages, if students with disabilities are to be adequately served by the schools.

A number of states have modified, eliminated, or waived some teacher certification requirements, generally in an effort to counteract these teacher shortages. Alternative certification models are nontraditional personnel preparation programs designed to reduce the time and expense of obtaining credentialing as a teacher through a streamlined curriculum coupled with intensive on-the-job supervision (Baird, 1990; Oliver & McKibbin, 1985). They allow individuals with college degrees in other fields to enter teaching without enrolling in a traditional campus-based teacher education program (Graham, 1988). Alternative certification is distinguishable from emergency certification, through which schools are authorized under certain circumstances to hire personnel without proper certification, who then must complete all existing certification requirements within a specified time period (Darling-Hammond, Hudson & Kirby, 1989; Smith-Davis & George, 1989). The implementation of alternative certification programs has generated considerable controversy over the legitimate nature and form of teacher education (Case, Lanier & Maskel, 1986; Corrigan & Haberman, 1990). Yet, the impact of such alternative certification models in reducing teacher shortages has not been determined.

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While it is certain that a variety of alternative certification models exist, because they have been described at professional meetings and in the literature, the number, location, and features of existing models is at present unclear. Different authors have reported conflicting information (Adelman, et al., 1986; American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1990; Baird, 1989; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1988; Feistritzer, 1990; Graham, 1989), while several surveys have produced inconclusive results because respondents confused alternative with emergency certification (CSPD Caucus, 1988; Office of Planning and Evaluation Services, 1988; Ludlow & Bloom, 1989). And, the number of alternative certification models that actually involve special education is even more uncertain (Smith-Davis, 1989). Ludlow and Bloom (1989) reported that only nine states had approved or were considering the adoption of an alternative certification model in special education. Accurate information about the nature and form of these models is needed to determine their applicability to other states.

To date, there has been practically no research reported investigating the effects of alternative certification models, or their impact on schooling or students. The existing literature has described the features of such models (Darling-Hammond, Hudson & Kirby, 1989; McKibbin, 1988; Shotel, 1989), but has failed to report data on the proficiency of teachers prepared by alternative certification programs, their subsequent employment and retention probabilities, or their impact on services to students. And, no data is currently available that evaluates the effectiveness of alternative certification models in preparing special educators (Hawley, 1990; Ross & Pipho, 1990; Smith-Davis, 1989). Such research is clearly needed, both by policymakers and by practitioners.

The controversy surrounding alternative certification in special education demands an immediate and serious research effort. Research is needed to determine the appropriateness of alternative certification training models in preparing special educators to deliver quality educational programming to students with disabilities (Geiger & Smith-Davis, 1989; Hawley, 1990), as well as their effectiveness in addressing the critical teacher shortages by increasing the pool of available teachers and reducing the turnover and retention problems (Smith-Davis, 1989). Proponents of alternative certification have asserted that such models encourage talented people from other fields to enter teaching (Cornett, 1988; Rowe, 1985) and increase the potential supply of teachers available to reduce shortages (Ross & Pipho, 1990; Roth & Lutz, 1986), and that traditional teacher education programs have little substance or value in preparing teachers (Sikula & Roth, 1984) while alternative models provide intensive training and supervision focused on critical skills needed for successful teaching (Baird, 1990; Dill, 1990). Opponents, on the other hand, have argued that alternative certification models fail to insure adequate standards of professional training (American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1985), contradict current trends to professionalize teacher preparation to achieve educational excellence (Darling-Hammond, 1984), and attract prospective teachers who are less qualified than many teacher trainees (Olsen, 1985) . Research must be designed to investigate whether alternative certification models achieve desired effects without sacrificing quality.

A study of alternative certification models has many implications for practice in teacher education in special education. Recent calls for reform in teacher education have stressed the need for longer, more rigorous programs of study (Carnegie Task Force, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986). As a result, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) adopted Standards and Guidelines for Curriculum Excellence in Personnel Preparation in Special Education to serve as minimum standards for the field (Council for Exceptional Children, 1987). Some authors have even argued for national standards of teacher certification in special education to insure quality educational programs for students with disabilities that are equivalent across the country (Gabrya, 1989; Heller, 1983; Reynolds, 1990; Strosnider & Little, 1988). Alternative certification models in special education run counter to these trends; thus, they have many implications for the development of new teacher training programs, as well as the modification of existing ones. The study of alternative certification models also has significant implications for educational policy at the state and federal levels. Both state and federal agencies, therefore, could make use of research findings existing on alternative certification models to drive future policy statements (Roth & Lutz, 1986). State educational agencies are faced with the challenge of obtaining certified teachers who are

appropriately trained and qualified to teach in a time- and cost-efficient manner. The federal government needs information to insure a wise investment of its resources in providing financial incentives to programs designed to address teacher shortages in special education, without impairing the quality of services to students with disabilities. The results of research on alternative certification in special education, therefore, would be useful to state and federal decision makers for the development, implementation, and evaluation of teacher education policies.

Research Design

This research project used a three-phase design based upon Babbie's (1975) elaboration model of survey analysis, to collect, analyze, and interpret data on alternative certification models in special education. In the initial Descriptive Phase, the investigators searched the literature, surveyed authorities in the field, and interviewed personnel at existing training projects, and used these data to describe the current status of alternative certification. During the subsequent Analysis Phase, the investigators selected two existing models for site visits, document reviews, and participant interviews in order to evaluate the effects of existing projects, compare existing projects with one another and with traditional teacher education program standards, and analyze local, state, and federal policies to determine the implications of alternative certification for policy and practice in special education. The third phase of the study incorporated qualitative ethnographic research techniques of document review and analysis, observation with field notes, and participant interviews to collect and interpret data about specific alternative program features: recruitment/eligibility of trainees, orientation, instruction, supervision, collaboration between school systems and colleges/universities, and program completion/trainee retention.

Findings from Program Comparison Phase of Research

After identifying alternative certification programs n special education alll across the country, the researchers selected two programs for further study; these programs had the longest history of operation, the broadest scope of areas of specialization, and the largest numbers of trainees (including a representation from minority groups), yet distinctive features, with one operated by a local school system and representing a large urban district (Houston Independent School District in Texas) and the other operated by a university and representing a combination or urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The co-principal investigators contacted the administrator of each program and arranged to an on-site visit lasting several days, and involving review of program documents and operation as well as interview of key personnel, including staff, prior and current trainees, mentors and supervisors, and employers. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed; field notes taken by the researchers during on-site visits also were transcribed. Written summaries of program documents such as program accreditation materials, course syllabi, practicum handbooks, and evaluation data (and copies of select information where permissable) were made and transcribed.

Houston Independent School District Porgram

The Houston program is operated by the Houston Independent School District in collaboration with the University of Houston. The district employs a full-time program administrator, several trainee supervisors called Professional Development Specialists, and selects a peer mentor (paid by stipend) for each trainee. A faculty member at the university serves on district committees to select trainees and make policy changes. The district advertises for trainees each spring, interviewing numerous applicants, and selecting 30 or more new trainees per year (depending upon available teaching positions). Prospective trainees are required to attend an orientation session lasting every evening for two weeks during April and May as well as to observe in classrooms for five full school days. Orientation sessions introduce trainees to basic conncepts in special education, such as lesson planning, classroom organization and management, and multicultural strategies, as well as to school policies, such as discipline policies, special services, and media resources. University faculty offer six basic courses (across all specialization areas) and three to four advanced courses for each specialization area. Coursesare restricted to trainees but scheduled on campus during summer sessions and in the evenings during regular semesters. Mentors (usually another special

educator in the same school building) provide advice and guidance, making observations visits at periodic intervals across the year. Professional development specialists each supervise a number of trainees in a given specialization area, also making observation visits at intervals throughout the school year. Trainees must pass all coursework, obtain a satisfactory rating by supervisors on the Texas Teacher Performance Appraisal System (TTPAS), as well as attain a passing score on the Exceptional Education Competency Evaluation Test (EXCET) in order to be fully certified. Trainees receive a professional salary (less $2500 per year to cover costs of participation in the program) and earn a full year or more of service toward tenure, taking one year to complete all requirements. Trainees may take additional coursework at the university to obtain a Master's degree, but few trainees avail themselves of this option because Texas does not provide a salary increment for advanced degrees. This program has the approval of the Texas Education Agency as an alternative certification program; the course requirements are identical to those offered through traditional programs at the University of Houston, which have been accredited by the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The Houston program's content is based on a curriculum matrix that identifies knowledge/skills/values in six areas: assessment; instructional modifications (for learning); instructional strategies (for behavior); educational policies; theories of learning and development; and program management. Instruction is delivered by university faculty through six required courses for all trainees (regardless of area):

Introduction to Exceptional Children
Introduction to Reading
Assessment
Diagnostic Teaching
Remedial Reading
Behavior Management

Trainees may take additional courses in their areas of specialization.

The Houston program internship (supervision of practice) is conducted throughout the year-long program, with observation and feedback provided by both mentors and supervisors (all school district personnel) according to a structured format determined by the Texas Teacher Performance Appraisal System (TPAS). Teaching competencies are assessed in five domains: instructional strategies; classroom management and organization; presentation of subject matter; learning environments; and professional growth and responsibilities. These competencies were specified by the Texas Department of Education for all teachers, and do not reflect skills specific to special education.

Participants in the Houston program were enthusiastic in their support for this alternative certification program. Most of the comments made by elementary and secondary teachers cited the importance of coursework with an applied (rather than theoretical) focus, the helpfulness of the mentors and supervisors (and to some extent instructors) in solving pupil learning and behavior problems in the classroom., and, most important, the personal support provided by the cohort group of other trainees. Elementary and secondary principals focused on how the recruitment and eligibility process enabled them to select trainees with personal qualities for effective teaching, and how the intensive contact with supervisory personnel enabled these teachers to "survive" an arduous first year of teaching. Project staff (both school and university personnel) stressed the improtance of effective collaboration between the school and university to insure a program of high quality and efficient operation.

San Jose State University Program

The San Jose program is operated by the Special Education Program at San Jose State University in cooperation with a variety of local (urban, suburban, and rural) school systems. The university appoints a faculty member to serve as a part-time program administrator, employs a number of university field supervisors, and pays a stipend to a peer mentor selected by the school district for each trainee if the school chooses to provide one. A committee composed of faculty members, administrators from the various school districts, and former trainees meets several times per year to review the program and recommend policy changes. Trainees may be recruited by

school systems or by the university, but each trainee is responsible for securing an appropriate teaching position prior to enrollment in the program. Prospective trainees attend an orientation session on a Saturday early in the Fall semester. The orientation session introduces trainees to basic concepts in special education, such as assessment, lesson planning, behavior management, time management, and bilingual education. University faculty offer four courses restricted to trainees and scheduled on release days once per month during regular semesters; four other courses are offered in the evenings and during summer sessions. School administrators are responsible for providing substitute teachers for trainees on release days. Mentors (usually another special educator in the same school building) provide advice and guidance, making observation visits at intervals across the year. University supervisors each supervise several trainees, making observation visits at intervals during the first and last semesters of participation in the program. Trainees must pass all coursework, obtain a satisfactory rating by supervisors in the culminating Directed Teaching experience, as well as attain a passing score on the California state teaching competency test in order to be fully certified. Trainees receive a professional salary and earn a full year or more of service toward tenure, taking two years to complete all requirements. Trainees may take additional coursework at the university to obtain a Master's degree, and many trainees avail themselves of this option to achieve a salary increment for advanced degrees. This program has the full approval of the California Credentialing Commission Certification Board as an alternative certification program; the course requirements are identical to those offered through traditional programs at San Jose State University, which have been accredited by the National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

The San Jose program's content is based on a curriculum matrix that identifies knowledge/skills/values in four areas: assessment; instruction; pupil and program evaluation; and professional interpersonal relationships. Additional competencies are reflected in specific courses. Instruction delivered by university faculty through one prerequisite and eight required courses for all trainees (regardless of area):

Introduction to Exceptional Individuals (prerequisite - in basic education credential)
Behavior and Classroom Management
Language Arts Programs
Individual and Classroom Program Development
Speech/Language Development
Counseling and Consultation Skills
Advanced Assessment
Career and Vocational Development
Math, Science, and Social Studies Methods

Trainees may take additional courses in their areas of specialization.

The San Jose program internship (supervision of practice) is conducted primarily during the initial semester (induction phase) and the final semester (evaluation phase) of the two- year-long program, with observation and feedback provided primarily by supervisors (all university personnel) according to a structured format determined by the university's special education program. Mentors provide guidance through a less-structured format. Teaching competencies are assessed in four domains: assessment/program development; instruction (including classroom organization and management); pupil and program evaluation; and professional interpersonal relationships. These competencies were selected by the university's special education program faculty to reflect skills specific to the role of special educator in the schools.

Participants in the San Jose program were enthusiastic in their support for this alternative certification program. Most of the comments made by elementary and secondary teachers cited the importance of coursework with an applied (rather than theoretical) focus, the helpfulness of supervisors (and to some extent instructors) in solving pupil learning and behavior problems in the classroom, and, most important, the personal support provided by the cohort group of other trainees. They especially liked release day classes, which freed them from classroom responsibilities one day per month to concentrate on studies. Elementary and secondary principals focused on how the recruitment and eligibility process enabled them to select trainees with personal qualities for effective teaching, and how the intensive contact with supervisory personnel enabled

these teachers to "survive" an arduous first year of teaching. Project staff (all university personnel) stressed the improtance of effective collaboration between the school and university to insure a program of high quality and efficient operation.

Program Comparisons

A comparison of the Houston and San Jose programs reveals more similarities than differences. Both programs rely on collaborative agreements, both employ similar systems of supervision (combining mentor teachers and supervisors), and both use a state-mandated exit exam for program completion. The most striking differences, perhaps, reflect the difference in sponsoring agency: San Jose is university-based, with assistance from school systems; Houston is school-based, with assistance from the university. One difference is in the nature of the recruitment and eligibility process, an elaborate affair involving review of applications and committee interview of candidates in Houston, as compared with each school's individual hiring procedures in San Jose; this represents the Houston school district's commitment to hiring the best possible personnel, a process that is not under the direct control of San Jose's program staff. A second difference is the extensive orientation/observation session in Houston, where the school system can require attendance by prospective employees, as opposed to the single-day session in San Jose, a university which has less authority to compel participation. Another important difference is the delivery of instruction, with San Jose implementing four release day courses, while Houston offers all courses in the evenings or summer sessions. The Houston program takes one year to complete because trainees start in the preceding summer and take only six basic courses; the San Jose program, on the other hand, takes two years to complete eight courses and two practicum experiences. While many of the courses are similar, the overall program philosophy reflects theoretical differences; the Houston program reflects an applied behavioral analysis orientation, while the San Jose represents a more eclectic approach.

All participants in both programs were agreed that alternative certification programs are a viable option for the preparation of special education personnel. Project staff in both programs asserted the superiority of the orientation-instruction-mentoring-supervision-trainee cohort core structure of each program over the typical inservice training offered to practicing special educators working on emergency or provisional teaching permits. Both staff and trainees across programs felt that the series of activities common to each cohort group of trainees provided a critical support system for new teachers as well as promoted more effective learning through discussion and sharing of experiences. Few participants identied any weaknesses or significant needs for improvement in eaither program; some individuals expressed "pet peeves" with each program, such as inflexible scheduling of courses that conflicted with other responsibilities, or the lack of formal training for mentors. The overwhelming response of all participants was to recommend alternative certification options as effective methods for addressing teacher shortages and attracting qualified individuals into the teaching profession.

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